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PROCEDURE AND SYSTEM AT IP-NETWORK

Abstract:

The invention describes how a distributor offers to a content provider facilities to offer, transmit and provide streaming media to an end consumer. The distributor provides the facility of caching the transmitted material, at which the distributor attends to that the end consumer receives the material adapted to the wishes and needs of the end consumer. Distribution of streaming media in an IP-network is made according to an agreed policy between content provider and distributor, at which the by the content provider by IP-multicast transmitted media is cached in a cache system before forwarding to end consumer. The caching is controlled by the policy that has been drawn up between the content provider and the distributor. The invention aims at removing problems of insufficient bandwidth in the IP-network between content provider and the end consumer by a procedure according to which streaming media is cached in a cache system according to a defined policy, after which said streaming media is forwarded to, and at request of him/her, an end consumer. After an initial transmission from the content provider by IP-multicast, said streaming media can be transmitted to a plurality of cache systems, including a plurality of media caches, without the load on the network becoming absurdly high. An end consumer after that can have said media forwarded from the media cache that is closest to his/her user terminal in the network. In addition, the end consumer can request a media quality that is adapted to the bandwidth that exists between said media cache and the user terminal.

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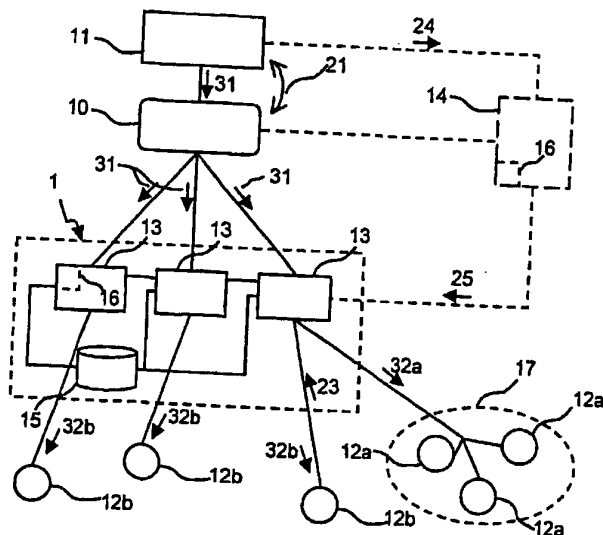
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streaming media is cached in a cache system according to a defined policy, after which said streaming media is forwarded to, and at request of him/her, an end consumer. After an initial transmission from the content provider by IP-multicast, said streaming media can be transmitted to a plurality of cache systems, including a plurality of media caches, without the load on the network becoming absurdly high. An end consumer after that can have said media forwarded from the media cache that is closest to his/her user terminal in the network. In addition, the end consumer can request a media quality that is adapted to the bandwidth that exists between said media cache and the user terminal.

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For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

PROCEDURE AND SYSTEM AT IP-NETWORK

TECHNICAL FIELD

5

The present invention relates to procedures and system for policy-controlled distribution of streaming media in an IP-network.

10 TECHNICAL BACKGROUND

The Internet of today often has insufficient transmission capacity when one wants to distribute multimedia material (streaming, or "direct played-back",
15 media) with large content of data, parallel to a large number of end consumers, for instance by IP-multicast. The reason for this is, among other things, that sufficient transmission capacity for parallel transmissions is lacking at the content providers. Other reasons can be an
20 insufficient bandwidth in the IP-network, or lack of means for securing quality of delivery at the content provider and/or the distributor.

Due to the poor transmission capacity on Internet, for
25 instance a video transmission, or the like, which is distributed according to known technology for distribution of streaming media, can be subject to unwanted interruptions in the media flow. With the aim of reducing the risk of interruption in the media flow, often a
30 temporary caching of the data flow from the content provider is utilized. In practice the caching implies that the transmission will be somewhat delayed, but in almost all cases this delay is of minor importance to the end consumer. Usually the caching is made locally in the end
35 consumer's terminal. If the content provider is located, in the network, a long distance from the end consumer, for

instance if there are a large number of network nodes in between, interruption in the media flow, however, can occur if there in the IP-network is created a high load during the transmission.

5

Another problem of the known technology is that the transmission has to be adapted to a certain bandwidth. For instance, the image or sound quality of the multimedia material has to be reduced with the aim of adapting the transmission to the one of the end users who has the lowest available bandwidth, so the quality will be unnecessary low for other end consumers. Alternatively, a higher quality of the multimedia material is utilized, which requires a larger bandwidth for the consumers, at which consequently certain potential end consumers are excluded from the transmission because of insufficient bandwidth.

15

Another problem at multimedia transmissions via IP-multicast according to known technology is that late joining end consumers have no possibility to receive the whole transmission.

20

Yet another problem is how to economize on the available network resources.

25

Summary of the invention

The aim of the present invention is to effect a procedure that solves above problems. This object is achieved by distribution of streaming media according to the steps that are described in enclosed patent claim 1.

30

The invention also relates to a system for distribution, according to above mentioned procedure, of streaming media, which is drawn up according to the enclosed patent claim 11.

35

The basis of the invention is an idea that a distributor shall be able to offer to a content provider improved possibilities to offer, transmit and provide streaming media to an end consumer. A basic idea, and
5 important advantage, of the invention is that the distributor provides the possibility of caching the transmitted material, at which the distributor attends to that the end consumer, at his/her request, will have this material, forwarded in a way that is adapted to the end
10 consumers wishes and needs.

Distribution of streaming media in an IP-network is consequently made, according the invention, according to an agreed policy between a content provider and a distributor,
15 at which the by the content provider by IP-multicast transmitted media is cached in a cache system before being forwarded to the end consumer. How the caching is made is controlled by the policy that is set up between the content provider and the distributor.

20 From one aspect the present invention is aiming at removing several of the problems that arise at insufficient bandwidth in the IP-network between a content provider and an end consumer. This is attained by a procedure according
25 to which streaming media, which initially is transmitted by a content provider, is cached in a cache system according to a defined policy, whereupon said streaming media is forwarded to, and at request of, an end consumer. After an initial transmission from the content provider by IP-
30 multicast, said streaming media can be transmitted to a plurality of cache systems, and to a plurality in these cache systems included media caches, without the load on the network becoming absurdly high. An end consumer after that can have said media from the media cache, which is
35 closest to his/her user terminal in the network, forwarded.

Furthermore, the end consumer can request a media quality that is adapted to the bandwidth that exists between said media cache and the user terminal.

5 From another aspect, the invention effects mechanisms for securing of quality of delivery in the IP-network between a content provider and an end consumer. According to the invention, measuring functions are attained, which decide which media caches that are best suited for caching
10 of streaming media in the light of the load of the IP-network, the location of potential end consumers in the network, the network location of end consumers who have already made a request for forwarding of streaming media, and in which media caches that different transmissions are
15 cached.

From another aspect, the present invention effects a procedure that gives an end consumer increased accessibility to streaming media that initially is
20 transmitted by a content provider. A procedure according to the invention includes caching of streaming media in a cache system, from where the end consumer can request forwarding of said streaming media at just any point of time.

25 From another aspect, the invention provides a possibility to the end consumer to indicate which bandwidth he/she has at disposal, at which the cache system adapts forwarding according to specified bandwidth. For instance,
30 the image or sound quality of said streaming media can be reduced to a level that is adapted to the available bandwidth.

The present invention in also provides a plurality of
35 other possibilities and advantages, which will be evident from the following description of some embodiments.

Different aims and characteristics also will be more evident as the description of these embodiments are read.

Brief description of the drawing

5 In the following, description of a number of embodiments of the invention is referred to the enclosed drawing, which shows included units in a system according to the present invention and data streams through the
10 system.

Description of preferred embodiments

15 With reference to Figure 1, initially a number of preferred services, functions and procedures in a system according to the present invention will be described by means of examples. The invention, however, is in no way limited to the exemplified services and functions.

20 Figure 1 shows a cache system 1, which includes a number of media caches 13 and a host server 15. The system is controlled by a management center 14, according to a policy 21, which is set up between a content provider 11 and a distributor 10. End consumers 12 follow transmissions
25 from the content provider 11 under forwarding via a media cache 13. Examples of how media can be distributed from the content provider 11 to the end consumer 12 are given below.

30 The distributor 10 and the content provider 11 set up a policy 21, which controls the rights and duties of respective party. One policy, for instance, informs about how long certain media material shall be cached in one by the distributor 10 managed cache system 1, with which
35 bandwidths the material shall be available to the end consumer 12, and with which degree of reliability the

Consumer 12 shall have possibility to access the material. The content provider 11 starts at a certain point of time, for instance at 9.00 p.m., transmission 31 from a server by IP-multicast of streaming media, for instance a film. This
5 film can possibly be followed directly by one or more end consumers 12. More important, however, is that the film is followed, according to the invention, by the media caches 13 in the cache system 1, which cache at least parts of the transmitted film 31, according to the with the content
10 provider set up policy 21, by which transmitted media is transmitted from the content provider 11 to the cache system 1.

Preferably, the whole film is stored in respective
15 media cache 13. Instead of following the film by IP-multicast, the media caches 13 can receive an earlier arranged transmission, so called "pre-streaming", of the film from the content provider 11. This "pre-streaming" can, for instance, have been performed at 8.30 p.m. in this
20 example. The end consumer 12 now has a plurality of options when he/she shall watch the film. If "pre-streaming" has been performed, the end consumer can choose to follow the film, at the occasion of the content provider's direct transmission, from one of the media caches 13, instead of
25 directly from the content provider 11. This can, for instance, be to advantage if said media cache 13 is, in the network, located much closer to the end consumer 12 than is the case with the content provider's server 11. Planned transmissions are, for instance, advertised via web pages,
30 or via direct e-mail, to interested end consumers 12. A certain end consumer requests forwarding of a specific transmission by transmitting a universally valid identification (ID) to a multicast group (not shown). The identification includes, for instance, the end consumer's
35 IP-address and a URN (Uniform Resource Name), which describes the requested transmission. A media cache 13, in

which the requested material is cached, and which in addition has capacity to forward this, responds with an information about at which local IP-addresses the material can be derived, or with an URL (Uniform Resource Locator) which in its turn returns the local IP-addresses. These IP-addresses can, for instance, be the own IP-number of the media cache (at forwarding with unicast) or a multicast group. At forwarding of previously transmitted material as above, IP-multicast 32a is suitably utilized also for the final transmission from the cache system 1 to the end consumer 12.

End consumers who receive forwarded transmission from the cache system 1 by multicast are in the figure indicated by the general reference designation 12a. In the case that the end consumer 12 should join the cache system 1, after the regular transmission has started, there is a possibility of fast-winding through the missed material (the missed part of the film), whereupon the end consumer 12 joins the regular transmission. With the aim of facilitating for the end consumer to scan through the part of the material that he/she has missed, an indexing function based on, for instance, a number of "key frames", is preferably implemented. The fast-winding is preferably transmitted directed to just this end consumer (unicast) 32b. End consumers who receive forwarded transmission from the cache system by unicast are in the figure designated by the general reference designation 12b.

In the cases when the connection to the content provider's server is poor, for instance if the cache system again and again has to ask for repetition 22 of lost data packets, a "delayed direct transmission" can be utilized. In this example, this "delayed direct transmission" can, as a suggestion, start for instance 9.15 p.m., by which the cache system 1 is given plenty of time for caching of the

from the content provider transmitted film. For economizing with network resources, also the transmission of the cached material is preferably made by IP-multicast.

5 After the transmission, the film should be accessible in the cache system 1 for a further period of time. An end consumer 12 then can on demand have the film forwarded from the cache system 1 at just any point of time. Such forwarding is suitably made by unicast 32b. In the cases
10 when a certain transmission, for instance an important news feature, is expected to be requested by a large number of end consumers, the forwarding is suitably somewhat delayed, whereby a plurality of end consumers will have time to transmit a request for watching the film. The requested
15 film then can be transmitted, by IP-multicast 32a, to these end consumers within, for instance, 30 seconds. Alternatively, the end consumer can have information about when the next transmission from the cache system 1 will occur.

20 The system can also be configured so that the end consumer 12 himself/herself is content provider. He/she consequently has possibility to store private material in the cache system 1, for instance a holiday film, whereupon
25 the material can be forwarded to a multiple of other end consumers, for instance the fellow travelers. Since a plurality of end consumers are expected to want to study the material, the transmission is suitably made by IP-multicast 32a.

30 The end consumer 12 also has possibility to record a certain transmission in order to watch it on a later occasion. In this way, the end consumer can make sure that the multimedia material (for instance a film or a radio
35 transmission) is in the cache system until final forwarding is requested.

The cache system (i.e. the media caches) can forward a transmission with different coding formats and with different resolutions or sound quality, and in that way adapt the material to different types of terminals at the
5 end consumer 12.

With reference to Figure 1, now a preferred system according to the present invention will be described. The most important functions are effected by a number of media
10 caches 13, which are coordinated in a cache system 1, and at least one management center 14. The management center can possibly be distributed in the system, which in the figure is indicated by showing it with dashed lines.

15 The media caches 13 listen for requests 23 about transmissions of cached media. An end consumer 12 transmits, for instance, a request that contains his/her IP-address and a URN that identifies the requested media material. If the called media cache contains the requested
20 material, and in addition is not too heavy loaded, said media cache responds to said request by forwarding the requested material to the end consumer.

The function 1 of the cache system against the content
25 provider 11 is, according to the set up policy 21 and the directions of the management center 14, to follow and store by the content provider 11 transmitted material, i.e. attend to that the media material is transmitted to the cache system 1. The storing is made either by following of
30 transmissions in progress, or by storing of a "pre-streaming" in progress. The management center listens for requests 24 from the content provider 11, about caching of streaming media. Such a request includes, for instance, among other things, information about which multicast
35 address that shall be used, when the transmission shall start, which multicast address that shall be used for

secure transmission, URN for the material, as well as a URL for further information about the transmission. The management center 14 also indicates which media caches 13 that shall be utilized, and initiates 25, if required, moving of media material between the media caches 13. In certain cases, the by the content provider 11 transmitted media is stored in a host server 15, which primarily is intended for longer caching. The host server 15 consequently is a special case of the media cache 13, for storing of media during a longer period of time. The policy 21 controls how long, and in which formats, the material shall be cached in the cache system 1. Said policy also controls which media caches 13 and/or host servers 15 that shall be engaged at each transmission. A policy can be formulated as *"All material from the news agency NN shall be stored in at least 5 media caches for at least 180 minutes", or "After 3 requests for a certain material being received by a certain media cache, and the requested material not found cached in this media cache, the material will be distributed there."* The system also includes a measuring function 16, which attends to requests that are coming to the cache system 1 from the end consumers 12, and analyses which of the media caches 13 that is best suited for forwarding of the requested material. Which media cache that is best suited is decided, for instance, on basis of the content in respective media cache 13, the end consumer's 12 location in the network in relation to respective media cache 13, and the load on the network, i.e. how much traffic that at the moment is passing through the network between respective media cache 13 and said end consumer 12. The coordination of the content etc. of the media caches 13 is suitably made by means of SCSP (Server Cache Synchronization Protocol). The necessary information is collected by the measuring function 16 of the system, whereupon the management center 14 decides which content that shall be stored in respective media cache 13. Said

measuring function is preferably implemented distributed in the network, for achieving a high efficiency. The measuring function 16, for instance, can be implemented as a part of the management center 14, or as a part of a media cache 13.

5 The measuring function also can attend to finding out the location in the network of an end consumer 12, finding out which media cache 13 that is closest a certain end consumer, or finding out the media content of respective media cache 13. The algorithm that is used in the system is

10 selected by the expert from case to case. A brief example of a cache algorithm is:

1. Store the material at a central place in the system, alternatively at a sufficiently large number of

15 places, to secure a reliable access to the material.

2. At a certain number of requests for the material (for instance 3) from the same place, copy the material to the media cache that in the network is closest to this

20 place. Said copying of the material is preferably made by IP-multicast on an occasion when an end consumer requests said material. The material then is stored, for instance, by synchronous caching.

25 Final forwarding to the end consumer 12 is made either by multicast 32a, or by unicast 32b. Below follow two examples of how forwarding can be executed.

Multicast. The content provider has advertised a

30 transmission which an end consumer 12a in a multicast group 17 joins. This can, for instance, be the case at "pre-streaming" or "delayed direct transmission". The advantages for the end consumer 12a is, in this case, that the quality of the transmission can be kept high, and that the

35 transmission can be shown at a, for the intended end consumer, appropriate point of time. For instance, the

original transmission from the content provider 11, has taken place at a point of time when it was night at the end consumers 12a in the multicast group 17.

5 *Unicast.* The cached material can be accessed by an end consumer 12b at just any point of time. The end consumer transmits a request, which includes a URN, to a multicast group (not shown), which is listened in to by the media caches 13. This request can have a limited administrative
10 scope (controlled by for instance, "multicast administrative scope" or TTL), which is gradually extended until a media cache responds. The response includes the physical address of the material in form of a URL. A similar function can be used also at multicast, when
15 instead physical addresses are returned by SDP (Session Description Protocol). An efficient division of load can be effected in the network, thanks to the media caches, which are listening and responding to requests, and the measuring function. A media cache responds only if it
20 has the material in question stored, and if it has sufficient of resources to forward the material.

PATENT CLAIMS

1. Procedure, for policy controlled distribution of streaming media in an IP-network, at which a transmission (31) by IP-multicast of streaming media is distributed from a content provider (11) via a distributor (10) to an end consumer (12a, 12b), which procedure includes the steps:
- to set up a policy (21) between the content provider and the distributor, which policy decides how the, by the content provider transmitted, streaming media shall be handled by the distributor,
 - to configure, according to the set up policy, a cache system (1) for caching of said streaming media,
 - to transmit said streaming media to the cache system, and
 - to forward (32a, 32b) at least parts of said streaming media from the cache system to the end consumer.
2. Procedure, as claimed in patent claim 1, where the step to configure a cache system further includes the step:
- to detach a number of media caches (13) to be part of said cache system, which media caches are intended for caching of said streaming media.
3. Procedure as claimed in any of the patent claims 1 or 2, where the step to transmit the by a content provider

transmitted media to the cache system further includes the steps:

- 5 - to wait for a request (24) from a content provider for distribution of streaming of media,
- to transmit, according to the set up policy and as response to a request from a content provider, said streaming media to one or more media caches
10 (13) in the cache system (1), and
- to request repetition of transmission (22) of at least parts of said streaming media to a certain media cache if the transmission has failed.

15 4. Procedure, as claimed in patent claim 3, where repeated transmission of parts of said streaming media, as response to the step to request repetition of at least parts of said streaming media to a certain media cache is
20 made directly from said content provider.

 5. Procedure, as claimed in patent claim 3, where repetition of transmission of parts of said streaming media, as response to the step to request repetition of
25 transmission of at least parts of said streaming media to a certain media cache is made from another, in the cache system included, media cache, to which the original transmission of said streaming media was successful.

30 6. Procedure, as claimed in any of the patent claims 1 to 5, where the step to forward said streaming media from the cache system to the end consumer, further includes the steps:

- 35 - to wait for a request (23) from an end consumer for forwarding of streaming media,

- to measure the load on the network between the end consumer and the cache system,
- 5 - to select, on basis of the end consumer's location in the network and the result of the step to measure the load on the network, the media cache in the cache system that is best suited for forwarding of said streaming media to said end consumer, and
- 10 - to forward, as response to a request from an end consumer, said streaming media to the end consumer from the selected media cache.

15 7. Procedure, as claimed in patent claim 6, which further includes the steps:

- 20 - to find out, on basis of the end consumer's location in the network and the measured load on the network, that there is at least one media cache that is better suited for forwarding of the in the cache system cached media to the end consumer than the media caches which for the time being are utilized, and
- 25 - that at least partly transmit in the cache system cached media to at least one media cache that is better suited for forwarding of the in the cache system cached media to the end consumer, than the media caches that are utilized for the time being.
- 30

8. Procedure, as claimed in any of the patent claims above, where the set up of said policy includes deciding at
35 least one/any of the following:

- in which data formats said streaming media shall be accessible to the end consumer,
- in which media caches said streaming media shall be accessible to the end consumer,
- how long time said streaming media shall be cached in the cache system, and by that be accessible to the end consumer,
- by what degree of reliability said streaming media shall be accessible by the end consumer.

9. Procedure, as claimed in any of the patent claims above, where the step to forward said streaming media to the end consumer at least partly is made at request of said end consumer, by means of fast-winding.

10. Procedure, as claimed in patent claim 9, where the cached media material includes a number of key frames, for facilitating the end consumer's request for fast-winding, at which the end consumer in a simple way finds requested part of the media stream.

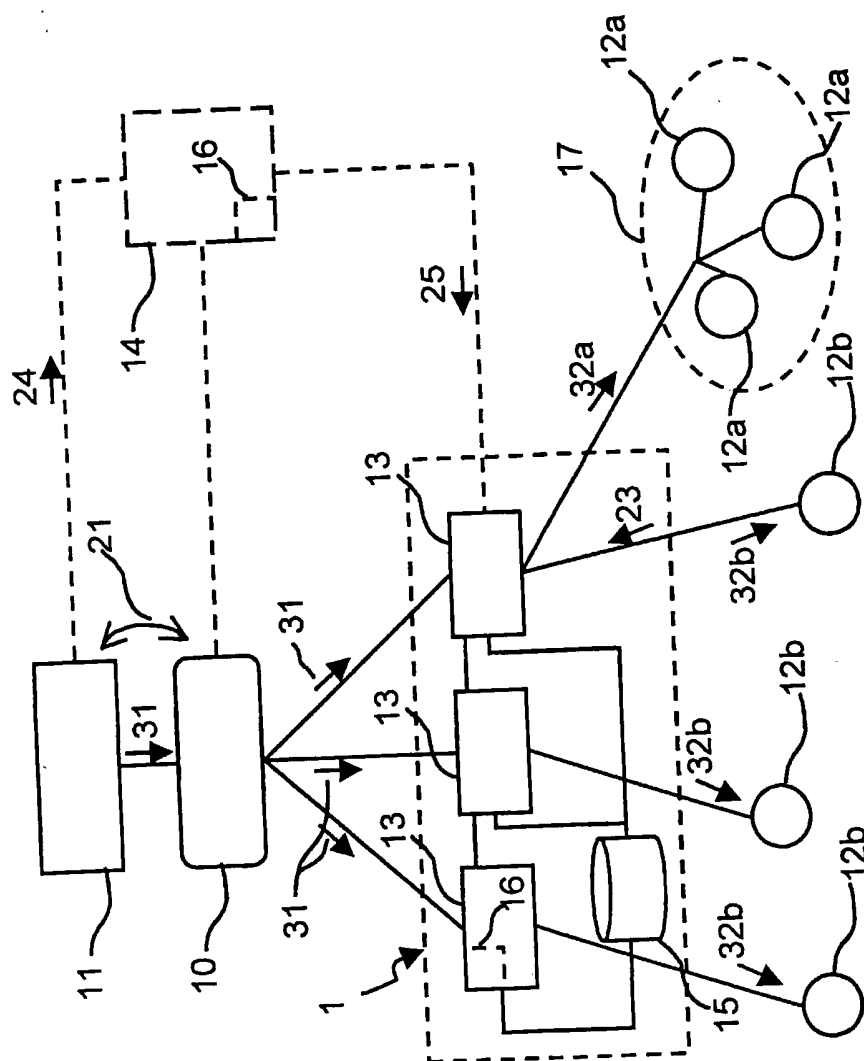
11. System for policy controlled distribution of streaming media in an IP-network that includes

- a cache system (1), which is arranged to receive and cache streaming media (31) that is transmitted by IP-multicast from a content provider (11), and to forward, at request of an end consumer (12a, 12b), said streaming media to said end consumer, and
- a management center (14), which is arranged to configure the cache system (1) according to one

between the content provider (11) and a distributor (10) set up policy (21).

12. System, as claimed in patent claim 11, in which the
5 cache system (1) includes a number of media caches (13),
which are intended for caching of streaming media.
13. System, as claimed in any of the patent claims 11 or
12, further including devices (16) for finding out the
10 location in the network of an end consumer who has
requested forwarding of streaming media.
14. System, as claimed in patent claim 13, further
including devices (16) for finding out which in the cache
15 system (1) included media cache (13) that in the network is
closest to the end consumer who has requested forwarding of
streaming media.
15. System, as claimed in any of the patent claims 11 to
20 14, further including devices (16) for finding out the
media content in respective media cache.

Figure 1



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/SE 00/01408

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC7: H04L 12/18, H04L 12/56, H04Q 11/00, H04N 7/173
According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC7: H04L, H04Q

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

SE,DK,FI,NO classes as above

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	WO 9917227 A1 (INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS MACHINES CORPORATION), 8 April 1999 (08.04.99), page 19, line 10 - line 40 --	1-15
PX	S.-H.G. CHAN ET AL: "Threshold-Based Admission Policies for Video Services"; in: Global Telecommunications Conference, 1999. Globecom, On page(s) 2076 - 2080, vol.4, 5-9 Dec.1999; retrieved from the Internet, IEEE, retrieved on 29 September 2000 --	1-15
A	US 5758085 A (JACK KOUOHERIS ET AL), 26 May 1998 (26.05.98), column 3, line 27 - line 63, abstract --	1-15

☒ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. ☒ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents:

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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

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C (Continuation). DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	WO 9824208 A2 (INMEDIA INVESTMENT LIMITED), 4 June 1998 (04.06.98), page 3, line 3 - line 23; page 5, line 12 - line 15; page 11, line 26 - page 15, line 3 --	1-15
A	US 5592626 A (CHRISTOS PAPADIMITRIOU ET AL), 7 January 1997 (07.01.97), column 5, line 10 - column 6, line 17 --	1-15
A	US 5737747 A (NATAN VISHLITZKY ET AL), 7 April 1998 (07.04.98), column 22, line 10 - column 23, line 19 -- -----	1-15

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

Information on patent family members

International application No.

PCT/SE 00/01408

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